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SUBJECT: NEW ZEALAND'S PRIORITIES FOR UPCOMING PACIFIC  
ISLAND FORUM (PIF) MEETINGS

Classified By: Pol/Econ Counselor Margaret McKean; Reasons 1.4 (b) and  
(d)

11. (C) Summary. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade's (MFAT) Pacific Division views Fiji's return to democracy, the status of RAMSI in the Solomon Islands, and support for the Regional Integrated Framework (RIF) as the GNZ's key issues for discussion at the PIF. New Zealand worries that Fijian leader Frank Bainamarama, absent strong external pressure, will continue to delay elections and use his people's charter initiative to establish an alternative political process. New Zealand is concerned about Solomon Island's PM Sogavare's absence from the PIF and the SI's lack of support for RAMSI; the GNZ worries that the SI may be more difficult an issue at the PIF than Fiji. New Zealand maintains that the RIF is the best mechanism by which the goals of the Pacific Plan can be realized. End Summary.

Fiji, Solomons: Both Problematic Issues  
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12. (U) On October 9, Pol/Econ Counselor met with John Adank of MFAT's Pacific Division to discuss GNZ priorities at the upcoming PIF meetings in Tonga. Adank attended the senior officials meeting in Tonga in late September, and will be accompanying PM Clark to the PIF meetings in Tonga next week. The GNZ delegation will consist of about 18 people, he said. Three main issues will dominate the leaders' agenda at the meetings, he continued.

13. (C) The primary issue remains Fiji and a return to democracy, said Adank. The PIF will be the first time since December of last year that the Pacific Island leaders will have the opportunity to take stock of what the PIF has accomplished. Much of the dynamic for how this issue is treated in Tonga will be determined by the makeup of the Fiji delegation sent to Tonga. Adank discounted press stories claiming that PM Helen Clark will meet with Frank Bainamarama in Tonga, saying that it was "unlikely" that Clark would hold bilateral meetings with the Fiji military leader or any of his ministers. Although Bainamarama has spoken publicly about coming to Tonga, Adank said that the sense at the senior officials meeting in Tonga two weeks ago was that Bainamarama might not show up. Irrespective, New Zealand remains concerned that Bainamarama is not committed to carrying out the election timetable and may use his people's charter initiative to set up an alternative political process. New Zealand recognizes that there are internal political fault lines (e.g., Fijian vs. Indian) within Fiji, but these must be handled by a legitimate government. Bainamarama, on the other hand, would rather address Fiji's internal divisions first but lacks the popular mandate and legitimacy that an elected government has to deal with

national reconciliation and other problems.

14. (C) Adank noted that the Solomon Islands continue to pose problems for both New Zealand and Australia; Adank said that the SI may be an even more difficult issue at the PIF than Fiji. The SI government has indicated that Sogavare will not attend at the leadership level. Foreign Minister Patterson Oti will come, but Sogavare's boycott will have a negative impact on discussions. Of greatest concern to New Zealand is the SI government's lack of support for the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI). Sogavare has been critical of RAMSI, despite a PIF-mandated review's conclusions that were in support of the assistance mission. Although Australia has borne the largest share of the criticism, Adank said that the Solomon Islands was not paying due regard to the investment in RAMSI by other Pacific Island states and the PIF. PM Clark has tried to call PM Sogavare but to no avail. New Zealand believes that Papua New Guinea (PNG) will play an important role in how the PIF handles SI's complaints about RAMSI, offered Adank. Adank explained that at the senior officials meeting in Tonga two weeks ago, the PNG High Commissioner from Suva made clear that he was very unhappy that the SI had abruptly canceled a consultation meeting on RAMSI. New Zealand had hoped that the PIF would provide an unqualified endorsement of RAMSI, but without Sogavare's participation, it is unclear whether the meeting can discourage the PM from further attempts to undermine and discredit RAMSI.

RIF -- Best Hope for the Pacific Plan to Succeed  
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15. (C) New Zealand will continue to press for acceptance of the Regional Integrated Framework (RIF) at the PIF, said Adank. Senior officials at the planning meeting in Tonga did

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not reach consensus; however, the outstanding issues were identified and included in a letter. The GNZ, continued Adank, believes that it should be possible to address the key issues (mostly surrounding fisheries), and recognizes there are entrenched interests among those island nations where various regional agencies (e.g., Samoan concern over the future of the South Pacific Regional Economic Program) are headquartered.

16. (C) Adank said he understood USG concerns surrounding legal issues and possible budgetary increases. Adank acknowledged that if the RIF were to go forward, there would be legal questions but that fact alone should not preclude its consideration. There may have to be changes to some underlying treaties, but if doing so provides better regional coordination and delivery of services, then that should be the overriding consideration. New Zealand, continued Adank, believes that the RIF is a way to re-organize resources and agencies into a more coherent whole. The U.S. does not need to increase budgetary amounts unless it is the USG interest to do so, he affirmed.

17. (C) Adank said that the only way the Pacific Plan is to have greater promise for success is to press forward with the RIF. He urged the USG to support the initiative, underscoring that the issue was very important to New Zealand.

KEEGAN